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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a course in the teaching of English as a second language (TESL) at McGill University to give graduating students insights into the problems classroom teachers encounter when working with children from multi-lingual backgrounds and to orient them to some of the techniques and procedures of teaching English as a second language. The first month of the course, with meetings three hours per week, was used to gain some basic understandings of linguistics and its contribution to TESL. After the first month, one hour of the course was spent in tutoring and the other two hours in dealing with problems arising from the tutoring situation and building on and extending basic understandings of principles and techniques gained earlier. Each student was asked to design a final project, guided by his tutoring experience as well as his reading and other experiences offered by the course. (HOD)

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DEVELOPING A COURSE IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE -

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Notes for a talk to be delivered at the Las Vegas Convention of NCTE, November 1971.

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Reasons for initiating the course

The language needs of immigrant children from multi-lingual backgrounds on the island of Montreal were not being adequately met. Their teachers, armed with basal readers in one hand and the traditional subject-oriented curriculum in the other, were trying to achieve the impossible task of teaching children to read a language which they had not really learned to speak. In the upper grades particularly, there was considerable pressure to "cover the ground" of a traditional curriculum which the children had not the listening, speaking and reading skills to understand. In a very large number of the elementary and High Schools of the city the immigrant children formed between 50-75% of the school population. The problem was particularly acute at the elementary level. The language of instruction in the schools was English, but the language of the homes and playgrounds could be anything from Greek, Italian, Portuguese, Chinese, Armenian or Arabic.

In a few schools - very few - there would be the occasional "withdrawal class where the non-English speaking children would be taught by a language teacher for 30 minutes per day. The rest of the day was spent by the child in his assigned classroom trying to cope with the traditional curriculum. Three schools had a 'language immersion' class where the children would remain until they picked up enough English to cope with the normal classroom situation. In far too many instances the departure of a child from such a class was dependent not on acquired competence in the language, but rather on the fact that the day before a plane had

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landed with some newcomers from Greece or Italy who needed his place even more urgently. These classes tended to be too large for successful language teaching. Fifteen should be the absolute maximum, twelve is preferable, ten is ideal, eight even more so.

The language teachers were keen, interested people but none had any training for this work. The regular class teachers were even less capable of teaching English as a second language. Thus the non-English speaking children were in some cases simply 'stored', at the back of the classes. In many cases, since they could do very little independent work, they tended to become discipline problems.

Because the teachers did not know now to deal with planned language lessons, but knew how to teach reading, this is what they "taught." In order to achieve some measure of success and to survive in this situation, the children soon learnt to parrot phrases, memorize words and sentences, and thus this is how they "read."

A course in the Teaching of English as a second language was developed to give graduating students from the Faculty of Education of McGill University in Montreal some insight into the problems mentioned above, and to orient them to some of the techniques and procedures of teaching English as a Second language. It was hoped that with this orientation they would be better able to give some effective instruction to the immigrant children in their classrooms.

The course was offered as an elective in the last semester and was open to Early Childhood, Later Childhood and High School majors. The students who opted for the course had no background in linguistics and their knowledge of the structure of modern English was very traditional.

We had three hours per week from January to April. The first month of the course was used to gain some basic understandings of linguistics and its contribution to TESL. The students read from a wide variety of sources and discussed their findings in two 'learning cell' activities, which proved extremely valuable. They were given a list of questions to guide their reading and research.

After the first month we decided that 1 hour of the course should be spent in tutoring and the remaining two should be used for

a) dealing with problems arising from the tutoring situation

b) building on, and extending basic understanding of principles and techniques gained earlier

The following films were used:

1) The Nature of Language and how It is learned.

2) The Organization of Language

3) The Sounds of Language

All by the Center for Applied Linguistics, Georgetown University.

The Two Required Texts were:

1. Teaching Young Students English as a Second Language by Faye Bumpass

2. Teaching English as a Second Language (Revised Edition) by Mary Finochiarro

Tutoring in two elementary schools near the University started during the second week of February. This was organized as follows:

- During one period of classtime, the students, working in pairs, tutored one child previously selected by the class teacher. The lessons were planned by the team and discussed with me beforehand.

- Each week one student taught while the other observed and made notes. Before leaving the school they left a copy of their plan and their evaluation of the lesson with the teacher.

Problems brought in by tutors:

- How can I get my Chinese student to pronounce words with 'r'?

- How can I get my Greek student to stop saying znow for snow and zleep for sleep? I keep asking him to repeat the words after me but he doesn't seem to hear the difference!

- My little Italian girl cannot pronounce 'th' no matter what I do? How can I help her? and so on and on.....

These questions led to the necessity to find materials on the pronunciation for ESL students from these language groups. The following articles proved useful:

1. Pronunciation difficulties in English for Speakers of Chinese by Ed Kuntz

2. Pronunciation difficulties in English for speakers of Chinese & Some Corrective Techniques by Esther Podoliak

3. Pronunciation Difficulties in English for Speakers of Greek and Italian and some Corrective Techniques by Kay Martin

All published in the Report of the Fourth Annual Conference for Teachers of English as a Second Language.

Toronto: Dept. of Provincial Secretary and Citizenship: 1970.

4. Greek Phonology Problems by Kay Martin - from TESL TALK: Toronto - International Institute, 1970.

5. Italian Phonology by Rita DeMaria
Interpreter - Counsellor, Toronto Board of Education.

6. Pronunciation Errors & Correction Techniques by W.E. McBride - TESL TALK Toronto: 1970

It was during this time that I made a collection of rhymes, poems and limericks for the students to try out in the various situations in which they were working. Students also started their own collections.

Each week I visited as many students as possible, observed their work, made notes on what I saw and offered suggestions in subsequent interviews with the students.

As the Tutoring developed, guided by my observations of their efforts, I tried to reinforce certain guidelines for teaching English as a second language. These had been discussed earlier on but were obviously not understood by the students:

1. The two main themes in TESL are linguistic and cultural. The first is to develop the ability to communicate in the language through the acquisition of sentence patterns in situational contexts rather than isolated words. The second is to understand the cultural and social values of the new country.
Thus developing various situational dialogues became very important.

2. Language should be taught in a context which has meaning and interest for the age group and ability level of the learners. The experiences of the children should be the starting point.

3. Language is Talk. We need to teach English speech flow from the very beginning - speech flow being a convenient term for stress, intonation and rhythm - "we shouldn't teach the words without the music."
Use authentic language, at normal or very normal speed. Encourage natural responses to questions, contractions are preferable to stilted replies, e.g. "what's this?" "It's a book" is both acceptable and desirable. A complete sentence should not be demanded unless it is a natural response to a particular stimulus.

The following methodology films were extremely useful in helping to illustrate the above guidelines:

1. What a Lovely House
2. Two and Three Word Verbs
3. Towards Free Conversation
4. Language Games for Children

We viewed these twice - once to watch the children and again to observe the methodology more closely.

Films by: The International Institute
The Dept. of the Provincial Secretary and Citizenship
Toronto, Ontario.

Examples of the work done by the students in collaboration with the cooperating teachers can be seen on the display boards. In addition, a number of diagnotic tapes and Language Master practice cards were made during the weeks of tutoring.

Each student was asked to design a final project, guided by his tutoring experience, his reading and other experiences offered by the course. The students were expected to develop techniques, design or collect materials and discuss relevant theory in a teaching/learning situation.

The enthusiasm displayed by the students was overwhelming. Young people really mean business today when they say "We want to get involved!" Here we had ample proof that the best learnings are provided when teaching and educational theory are experienced concurrently.

In supervising the students' work in the schools I became acquainted with the teachers whose pupils were involved in the project. We lent them some of our most useful films, and from time to time I was invited to discuss some of their major problems with them.

As a result school boards are now asking for inservice TESL courses for their teachers and more students than the present TESL staff of one can possibly cope with have indicated their intention of registering for the next elective course to start in January, 1972.

Handouts:

- Audio Visual Aids for ESL teachers
- Speech Rhymes for ESL classes

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